R.L. STINE

Goosebumps®

PRESENTS

TV BOOK #18

REVENGE OF THE LAWN GNOMES

WITH EIGHT PAGES OF COLOR PHOTOS FROM THE SHOW!

BASED ON THE HOT TV SERIES

SCHOLASTIC

PARACHUTE

1

SPLAT! My softball plopped into the mud. I scooped it up in my mitt. Then I glared across the lawn at my sister.

"Come on, Mindy," I yelled. "Stop throwing like a wimp." I tossed the ball back to her. Perfect throw — right into her mitt.

The ball bounced out of the webbing and onto the ground.

"Cut it out, Joe," Mindy cried. "Quit throwing so hard." Mindy is thirteen. That's one and a half years older than I am. But sometimes she acts like a real baby.

"That's how you're supposed to do it," I argued. I held my glove in front of me. "Come on," I urged her. "Try again."

Mindy pushed her long brown hair out of her eyes. Then she flung the ball at me with all her might. The ball flew over my head. It sailed across the backyard fence and landed on the other side.

In the neighbor's yard.

"Uh-oh!" Mindy gulped.

"Way to go," I muttered. "*You* threw it. Now *you* can go get it."

"No way!" Mindy peered into Major McCall's yard and shuddered. "I'm not going in there!" she said. "What if he comes out?"

I glanced over the fence. The major's Jeep was in the driveway, but the yard looked empty. "That's a brand-new ball," I complained. "I don't want to leave it there."

"You'd better stay out of the major's yard," Mindy warned me. "Remember what he said last time. He —"

"Yeah," I cut her off. "He said the next time any of us Burtons came onto his lawn, it would be the last time!"

Mindy shrugged. "Well?" she said.

"Well, I'm sick of the major's threats," I told her. "And I'm sick of losing stuff."

Major McCall was in the army a long time ago. And he acts as if he's still in it. He has all of these rules. Like, anything that winds up on his property belongs to him!

The major already had at least ten of my old softballs. I didn't feel like giving him another one. I started toward the gate between our yard and the major's.

"Careful, Joe!" Mindy called after me.

I rolled my eyes. "Why don't you yell a little louder?"

"Oops! Sorry!" Mindy whispered.

I slowly opened the gate. It made a loud creaking sound.

Oh, no! The major would hear me for sure! I held my breath and waited.

Nothing. No one. I was safe.

I slipped into the major's yard. I had to find my ball — fast. There! I spotted it right in the middle of a rosebush.

I knelt in the dirt and reached for the ball.

OUCH! I yanked my hand back. A huge thorn had jabbed into my thumb.

I reached in again. This time I tried not to touch any stems. It wasn't easy. The roses were all twisted around each other.

The sun felt hot on my neck. My shirt was sticky with sweat.

My fingers brushed the ball. I had it!

I wrapped my hand around the ball. Slowly and carefully, I pulled it toward me.

I yanked the ball free of the roses. "Got it!" I exclaimed.

"Not so fast!" A huge, heavy hand grabbed my shoulder and twisted me around.

2

Major McCall snatched my softball away. Then he waved it in my face. "Looking for something?" he asked.

"Hey!" I cried. "That's mine."

The major tossed the ball up in the air and caught it again. "Not anymore." He sneered. "Now it's mine!" He stuffed it in the pocket of his green army uniform. Then he marched stiffly back toward his house. His silver crew cut gleamed in the sun.

"Hey," I cried again. But a loud car honk drowned me out.

"Dad's home!" Mindy yelled. Our old blue pickup truck bounced up the driveway and into the garage.

Dad leaned his head out of the driver's window. "Hi, kids," he hollered. "Look what I found!"

Mindy ran over to the truck. "More lawn ornaments, Dad?" she asked.

My father just smiled. My parents are always bringing home statues and decorations for our yard.

"See for yourself," he said, pointing to the back of the truck. "I stopped by Lawn Lovely this morning and bought two great statues. Come see, Joe," he called, waving me over.

I took one last look at Major McCall's house. Then I hurried back through the gate.

"Dad," I complained. "That maniac McCall took my ball. He just *took* it!"

My father sighed. "Oh, Joe," he said. "*Your* ball didn't happen to be in *his* yard, did it?"

"Uh-huh," I admitted. "But it wasn't my fault. I —"

"What do you want me to do?" Dad interrupted. "Go over there and start a war?" He shrugged. "Forget the major. I'll buy you a

new ball later. Right now I want to show you something."

Dad looked so excited that I couldn't help smiling. He and my mom have a real thing for lawn ornaments. We have more statues than grass in front of our house.

"Oh, okay," I said. I followed him around to the back of the truck. What did he find this time? We already had a stone deer, a skunk, a turtle, a bunch of plastic flamingos, and a whole herd of wrought-iron cows.

I climbed up into the bed of the truck. There wasn't much room. It was full of tools and lawn equipment.

The new statues were crammed in at the back. They were both facing front, as if they were trying to see through the windshield. All I could see was a green cap on one statue's head.

I turned it around to get a better look — and gasped.

That thing was ugly — and I mean *ugly*! It had glassy black eyes, big pointy ears, and sharp teeth.

"Whoa!" I cried. "What *is* this?"

"It's a gnome," Dad explained. "Gnomes are kind of like trolls."

I checked out the other statue. It was worse than the first one. It wore a bright red cap. Its pointy teeth sparkled in the dim light from the garage door. And its eyes were red. Red and glowing!

I took a step back and landed on a coil of rope on the floor.

The rope moved. My feet slipped out from under me. I looked around for something to break my fall. But the only thing near me was the creepy little statue.

Its eyes gleamed in the dim light. Its arms reached for me — and pushed me.

CRASH!

I landed flat on my back with the red gnome on top of me. I stared up into its ugly face. Its lips were pulled back over its sharp teeth.

The gnome was smiling at me. Only it wasn't a friendly smile.

It was more like a grin.

An evil grin!

I sat up. The red gnome grabbed my arm. The green gnome reached for my legs.

Their eyes glowed red.

"*Aaargh!*" I screamed. "Dad! Mindy! Help me! The gnomes are attacking!"

3

My sister snorted. "Oh, wow!" Mindy laughed. "That is *so* scary, Joe."

"Come on," Dad said. "Stop horsing around." He pulled one of the gnomes off me.

It wasn't moving. No glowing eyes. No gleaming teeth.

Just a regular statue.

Dad gave it a pat on the head. "So," he asked, "are these things terrific or what? I can't wait for your mom to see these."

I stared at the gnome with the red cap. Its eyes weren't glowing, but still . . . it seemed to be *watching* me.

"I don't know," I said. I shoved the other gnome aside and scrambled to my feet. "Don't you think they're kind of evil-looking?"

"Come on, Joe," Dad said again. "Get serious." But I *was* serious. There was something really weird about those gnomes.

"Well, I think they're cute," Mindy put in.

"Me, too," Dad declared. He lifted the statues out of the truck and set them down on the grass. "With these guys in the yard, we'll definitely win this year's Summer Garden Contest," he added proudly. "Am I right?"

"Sure," Mindy agreed. "And for Christmas, we can dress them up as elves. All we need —"

Mindy stopped talking when a door slammed nearby. Major McCall stepped out of his house and marched right over to our fence.

He took one look at the lawn gnomes and

burst out laughing. "Hey, Burton! I didn't know your relatives were coming to visit," he yelled over the fence. He chuckled at his own joke.

"Hey!" I yelled back. "You can't —" Before I could say anything else, Dad put his hand on my shoulder. "If the major wants to be a jerk, let him," he whispered.

"I *thought* I could win the Garden Contest this summer," the major announced. "But now I *know* it!"

He stepped through the gate and began marching up and down our lawn. He looked as if he were giving our yard a military inspection. What a stiff!

The major stopped in front of the gnomes. He tapped one on the head. It made a dull *THUNK*. "What a piece of junk!" he said.

"It's *our* garden," Mindy declared. "And we like it!"

"Yeah," I told the major. "Not everyone wants their flowers to stand at attention."

"Hmph!" the major snorted. "We'll just see what those contest judges have to say. When they get a look at my perfect fruits and flowers on Sunday, that Summer Garden Award is marching straight home to me!"

I peered over the hedge at the major's garden. All the different plants were lined up like little soldiers. "Get real," I muttered under my breath.

"What was that, Joe?" he snapped. "Did you say something?"

I saluted. "No, sir!" I answered. "You may go back to your petunias now, sir."

"Joe!" my father exclaimed. "Don't be rude to the major."

The major narrowed his eyes. "That's okay, Burton," he said. "I just hope Joe here isn't planning any sneak attacks on my garden. No night raids or —"

"*What?*" I cried.

"You're way off base," Dad told the major. "My son wouldn't do anything like that. He's

been brought up to respect other people's property."

"Is that why he comes tramping through my rosebushes every five minutes?" the major snarled. "Let me say this loud and clear," he went on. "If anything happens to my beautiful garden, I'll be looking for *him!*"

We all watched the major stomp back into his house.

I glanced over at our new lawn ornaments. The gnomes seemed to be watching Major McCall, too.

Their beady little eyes followed him as he walked.

There was definitely something creepy about those gnomes!

For the rest of the day I got a funny feeling every time I went near the yard. Our new statues weren't just ugly.

They were really spooky. They almost seemed . . . alive!

Just before dinner, I took one more peek at

the gnomes. I stood at the dining room window and stared out at them.

And the gnomes stared back at me!

The gnomes were staring at me!

My heart slammed against my ribs.

The gnomes began to move. They walked across the lawn toward me.

They were coming to get me!

4

"Nooo!" I yelled.

I sat up in bed.

"It was a dream," I whispered. I let out a sigh of relief. "Just a dream." Ever since I saw the gnomes watching me before dinner, I couldn't get their strange eyes out of my mind.

Now I was having nightmares about them!

I jumped out of bed and hurried over to the window. In the bright morning sunlight, I could see the gnomes. They stood in their place beneath the oak tree. But it seemed as if they were staring up at my bedroom window.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

I jumped. Someone was pounding on the back door.

"Open up!" an angry voice demanded.

I quickly got dressed. Then I ran downstairs to see what all the noise was about.

My father stood at the back door in his robe. "Hold your horses!" he hollered as the pounding continued. "I'm coming!"

I waited on the staircase while Dad opened the door. Major McCall stepped into the kitchen. He held two squashed honeydew melons in his hands. His eyes flashed with anger.

The major shoved the melons in front of Dad's face. "Ruined!" he cried. "They're totally ruined."

"Whoa!" Dad exclaimed. He stepped back. "Take it easy, major."

"Take it easy?" the major shouted. "Just look at my melons!"

"Oh, boy!" Dad shook his head. "What hap-pened?"

The major pointed at me. "I warned him," he yelled. "I warned him not to sneak into my garden!"

Dad gazed up at me with a frown. I hurried down the stairs.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Well, Joe," my father replied. "It seems that someone smashed the major's melons last night."

The major glared at me. "I went out to water my flowers before sunrise," he explained. "And look what I found."

He tried to shove the melons in my face. I put my hand up to keep him away. Seeds and pulp dripped down my arm and onto the floor. Gross!

"Maybe a raccoon did it," I suggested. I wiped my hand on my sweatshirt.

"Nice try," the major snapped. "Raccoons may be smart, but I never heard of one who could do this." He turned one of the melons around.

Dad and I both stared in surprise.

The unsquashed side of the melon was covered with black ink. Someone had drawn a big head on it. A square-jawed, crew-cut head, topped off by an army cap.

Major McCall's head!

I glanced from the major to the melon and back again. The melon drawing looked exactly like him! I choked down a laugh.

"I warned you to stay out of my garden," the major yelled.

"I didn't go in your garden," I argued. "I didn't —"

"It will take more than dirty tricks for you to win the contest," he interrupted. Then he dropped the smashed melons on the porch steps and stomped off.

Dad bent down to clean up the mess. I could tell he was angry, too. I just hoped he was mad at the major — not at me.

"I didn't do it, Dad," I insisted. "Honest."

My father gave me a long look. "I believe you, Joe," he finally said. "But I think you'd better stay out of the major's way for a while."

"You can count on it," I promised.

* * *

After breakfast, I wandered outside. I planned to stay as far from the major's house as possible.

The minute I stepped into the backyard, I felt the hair on my neck stand up. I got a strange prickly feeling up and down my spine.

I felt as if someone was watching me.

But who?

I glanced over at the major's yard. He was nowhere in sight. Then I looked at the lawn gnomes.

They were both staring back at me!

I knew it was only the sunlight reflecting off their glassy eyes. But it still made me nervous.

I took a few steps to the left. I could feel the gnomes' eyes on my back, following me.

Quickly, I spun around. The gnome with the red cap was staring straight ahead. But the other one's eyes were turned toward the left.

Toward *me*!

I tried to remember if their eyes had always been that way. I didn't think so.

"There's my naughty little brother," Mindy cried. I turned to see her standing behind me. She held three plastic rings in one hand and a chocolate-chip cookie in the other. "What kind of mischief are you up to now?" she teased.

I wanted to ask Mindy if she noticed anything funny about the gnomes' eyes. But I decided not to. She would think I was nuts.

"Uh . . . none," I replied.

Mindy began chomping on the cookie. "Want to play ringtoss?" she asked. "Those pointy gnome heads will make perfect targets."

"Why don't we just use *your* pointy head?" I suggested.

Instead of answering me, Mindy tossed a ring at the gnomes. It sailed right over the gnome's red cap and slid down its neck. "All *riiiight*!" she cried.

I heard a loud *harrumphing* sound from behind me.

Major McCall stood in his yard, watching us. He gave me a dirty look and marched over to his rosebushes.

"I'm telling you, Mindy," I said. "I didn't smash those stupid melons."

"Then, who did?" she wondered, picking up another ring.

I grabbed the ring out of her hand. "I have no idea," I admitted. "But if I did, I'd give the guy a high five!"

I could feel the major's eyes boring into my back. I hurled the ring.

It bounced off the green gnome's nose and onto the grass.

"Nice one," Mindy teased me.

I picked up the third ring.

"Is that your father's idea of punishment?" Major McCall called from across the fence. "Playing games with those ugly pieces of junk?"

I made believe I was going to throw the ring around the major's neck. Mindy snatched it from my hand. "Chill out, Joe," she whispered under her breath.

She was right — I had to chill. After all, I'd promised Dad that I would stay away from the major. I turned my back on him. Now I was face-to-face with the gnomes again.

I still had the ring in my hand, so I let it fly. This time it slipped right over the green gnome's head.

"Yes!" I cried.

I ran over to the gnomes to pick up the rings. I snatched my ring from the green gnome's neck. Then I knelt down to pick up the ring I had dropped.

My eyes were even with the green gnome's hand.

Something dark and sticky covered its hand. It looked like ink.

I rubbed at the smudge. It came right off on me. It *was* ink. *Black* ink.

Just like the ink on Major McCall's melons!

I stared into the gnome's face. Even though the sun was shining brightly, I felt cold. It wasn't only the gnome's eyes that gave me the creeps. It was the mouth. Once again, it seemed to be smiling.

Only this time, there was something stuck between its parted lips.

I reached over and pulled it out.

A melon seed.

From the major's honeydew melons!

5

Black ink? A melon seed?

I couldn't believe it. Did this mean that the *gnomes* had drawn the picture on the major's melon?

No way, I told myself. Lawn ornaments don't draw pictures. And they don't walk into the neighbor's yard and smash up fruit.

They're only statues.

Aren't they?

Somehow, I had to find out. But how?

For the rest of the day, I watched the gnomes. They stayed still as statues.

But every time I turned my back, I felt their eyes on me. I felt them watching me.

I told myself it was just my imagination. The gnomes were only statues.

But I still wasn't sure by the time I went to bed.

A slurping sound woke me up at midnight.

I slipped out of bed and crossed to the window. The curtains blew in the breeze. Creepy shadows danced on the wall. I pulled the curtains back and peeked outside.

A dark cloud covered the moon. Everything was black. I couldn't see a thing. But I could *hear* plenty!

Strange sounds down in the garden. Grunts and groans. A soft snort. And then . . .

Silence.

I held my breath and listened. There it was again!

SLURP! SLURP!

I looked down. Red eyes glowed in the dark.

The lawn gnomes!

I zipped a sweatshirt over my pajamas and crept downstairs. As I opened the back door,

the clouds suddenly parted. A sliver of moon shone down on the yard.

I could barely make out the dark shapes of the lawn ornaments: the deer, the skunk, the turtle, the flamingos, the cows. It all seemed perfectly normal. Except for one thing. The gnomes!

The gnomes were gone!

There were two empty spots where they should have been.

I peered into the darkness. A pair of red eyes burned brightly in the bushes near the oak tree. The moment I caught their gaze, they disappeared.

Footsteps shuffled on the gravel path that led to the woods behind our house. Then they faded into the night.

I took a big gulp of air and hurried after them.

The footsteps led me deep into the darkness. Then they stopped. Where were the gnomes?

My heart pounded in my ears.

I heard rustling sounds. Getting louder. Coming closer.

Closer!

I looked down and saw a fluffy tail disappear through the bushes.

Whew! It was only some dumb raccoon. That explained the rustling leaves and shining eyes. But what about the gnomes?

Where *were* they?

CRASH!

A loud noise came from the major's yard. I jumped. It's probably another raccoon, I told myself.

The wind suddenly picked up, whistling through the trees. It sounded as if someone was sighing. Or crying. Then the sighs turned to whispers. The whispers turned to wails. They sounded almost human.

I glanced over at the major's house. A dim light glowed on the porch. Inside, the house was dark and still.

The wind died down as suddenly as it had started. Now it was totally quiet.

"Something weird is going on," I whispered.

I crouched down, crept to the fence, and slowly peeked over the top. That's when I saw them.

The gnomes!

The gnome with the red cap was in Major McCall's rosebush. The green one was in the melon patch. Two other gnomes swung from the apple tree.

Other gnomes? Where did they come from?

All four gnomes seemed to be having a great time, chattering and giggling.

I was so surprised that I stood all the way up. One of the new gnomes spotted me and let out a yell.

The gnomes in the tree jumped down. The two that were already on the ground stopped giggling and turned toward me.

I bit my lip to keep from screaming.

The gnomes looked serious now. Serious and scary!

I took a step back. The gnomes moved forward.

Their eyes glowed red in the pitch-black night. I stood there, frozen. Too scared to move.

The gnomes attacked!

6

BZZT! A bright white spotlight snapped on. The light beamed down from the major's roof.

BZZT! Another light came on. And another. And then another. A siren blared. The whole garden was suddenly filled with sound and light.

The major must have put in a new security system.

All of the gnomes froze where they were. So did I.

I blinked in the harsh light. Then I blinked again. I couldn't believe my eyes. The major's garden was a wreck.

The lilac bushes were almost bare. Pale purple flowers covered the ground. The

branches looked as if they'd been chewed on by a herd of hungry elephants.

The roses were just as bad. Even the thorns had been ripped from their stems.

And there was nothing left of the melon patch. Nothing but big empty holes in the ground where the roots must have been.

Major McCall burst onto the porch. "What's going on down here?" he shouted. "What's all the —"

The major's jaw dropped when he saw the mess. His eyes darted wildly around the torn-up garden.

Then he looked at me.

"My beautiful garden!" he gasped. "What have you done to it?"

"N-nothing. It wasn't me," I stammered. "It was the gnomes."

The major flashed me a look of total disbelief. Then he bent down and picked up a clump of dirt. A few shredded flowers still clung to it. "My lilies," he moaned.

He picked up another clump. "My daisies!"

For a moment, his eyes filled with tears. But when he turned back to me, they were burning with rage.

"It wasn't me," I repeated. "It was the lawn gnomes!"

"What kind of fool do you think I am?" the major yelled. "You're going to pay for this, young man."

Finally the major noticed the gnomes. "What are these hideous things doing in my yard?" he demanded. He stormed over to them. He knocked one over with each hand.

"What's going on over there?" Dad's voice called.

Dad! I'd never been so happy to see anyone in my whole life.

"Joe?" Dad called. "What are you doing out here?"

"See for yourself," the major answered. "Your son has destroyed my garden."

Dad put an arm around my shoulder and gave it a squeeze. "You can't be serious, McCall!" he exclaimed.

"You bet I am," the major said stiffly. "Even you can't deny it this time." He pointed angrily at the uprooted plants. "I caught the boy red-handed."

I watched my father's eyes slowly take in the garden. He frowned. "Joe?" he murmured.

"I didn't do it, Dad!" I cried. "Honest. It was the lawn gnomes."

Dad's eyes narrowed. I could tell that he didn't believe me. I could hardly believe it myself.

"Please," I tried again. "Listen to —"

"Stop right there," Dad interrupted. He dropped his hand from my shoulder.

"No, really!" I protested. "I heard a noise. I came out. The gnomes were —"

This time the major cut me off. "Your boy's a liar, too," he told my dad.

"Please, Dad," I cried. "I know it's hard to believe. But I'm telling the truth."

Dad shook his head and groaned. "Oh, Joe! It isn't *hard* to believe," he said. "It's *impossible!*"

I gave him a pleading look. But he wouldn't even meet my eyes. "You're going to fix Major McCall's garden," Dad declared. "Every last petal, vine, and blade of grass."

"But —"

"Until it's perfect!" Dad added. "Now get back inside and go to bed. We'll talk more about this in the morning."

I shuffled home. Dad stayed behind to apologize. "I'm truly sorry about this," I heard him tell the major. "I don't know what my son was thinking of. I don't know what else to say," Dad went on. "I'll just take my gnomes and go."

I stopped outside our house and watched Dad pick up the gnomes. There were only two of them now, I noticed.

I wondered where the other two had gone.

The major's spotlights were still on. I could see my father's face clearly. He looked really upset.

I could see the gnomes' faces, too.

Their lips were drawn back in nasty grins.

Their eyes were blazing in the cold, dark night.

Staring at me.

And then the gnome with the red cap winked.

7

Dad woke me up early the next morning. He sent me straight over to the major's yard. The place looked even worse in the daylight. I almost felt sorry for the guy.

Almost.

"Move it, soldier," the major commanded as I trudged through the gate. "You're going to replant this entire garden in time for the contest tomorrow. And you're going to do it *my* way!" He waved a big rolled-up piece of paper in my face.

Major McCall spread the paper out on the ground. I squatted down to see it.

It was a graph-paper drawing of the whole garden. All the boxes were neatly filled in

with different colors. Each square must have stood for a different plant.

I plopped down on the ground while the major explained what belonged in each box.

"Nice straight lines," he said with a stiff smile. "They remind me of the time . . ." He closed his eyes, and his voice drifted off. I guess he was dreaming of some great war or something.

I stretched out on the grass to soak up the sun.

"Okay, soldier!" the major snapped. "That's enough of a break. There's work to be done here!"

For the next two hours, I dug and I raked. I carried plants from one place to another. I carried rocks from the front of the garden to the back.

Every time I finished one chore, the major came up with another one.

Meanwhile, the sun burned hotter and brighter. It must have been one hundred degrees outside!

I was ready to collapse. I glanced at my

watch. Almost noon. Time for lunch! I threw down my shovel and breathed a sigh of relief. All that hard work had made me hungry.

"If you're wondering what time it is . . . ," the major barked, coming up behind me, "it's time to get back to *work!*"

He pointed to a shiny red wheelbarrow beside the shed. It was filled with brown stuff that looked like mud. But it didn't *smell* like mud.

"Haul that manure over to the rosebushes!" the major ordered. "On the double!"

I pushed the manure across the yard, trying not to breathe too deeply. That stuff really stinks! The ground was all torn up. Every time the wheelbarrow hit a rock or rut, the manure moved. And the smell rose up to my nose.

By the time I got to the bushes, I was drenched with sweat. I was sick to my stomach, too.

As I dumped the manure onto the ground, two big brown eyes peered over the fence.

"P-U!" Mindy gagged. "What is that gross smell? Is it you, Joe?" she asked. "Or that?" She held her nose with one hand and pointed to the big brown pile with the other.

"Probably both," I admitted. "But I'm too hot and tired to care."

"Well, it serves you right for making up that lame story about the gnomes," she told me.

"I didn't make it up," I insisted. I tried wiping my sweaty face with my sleeve, but my shirt was soaked, too.

Mindy chuckled. "Maybe if you ask nicely, the *gnomes* will finish your yard work for you."

Very funny! Obviously *no one* was going to help me. Not Mindy, not my dad, and definitely not Major McCall. I sighed and got back to work.

By the time the sun went down, the major's garden looked great — but *I* was a real mess!

I hurried home and jumped into the tub. For once, Mom didn't have to remind me to

take a shower. Then I changed into some clean clothes and went downstairs.

I was so tired, I could hardly stay awake through dinner. The minute the dishes were cleared, I hurried upstairs and plopped down on the bed. I didn't even take off my clothes.

I figured I'd fall right asleep this time. But I didn't. I couldn't get the lawn gnomes off my mind.

No matter what my dad and the major thought, *I* knew I hadn't ruined McCall's garden. The gnomes had! I'd seen them with my own eyes.

If only there was some way to prove it. I sat up and turned on the light. There *had* to be a way.

But what?

I glanced around the room, thinking hard.

That's it! I hurried over to my desk. The video camera my parents had given me for Christmas was right there. I picked it up and moved it to my night table.

Once I had the gnomes on videotape, my dad would have to believe me!

I set my alarm clock for midnight and went to bed.

BRRRING!

Quickly, I turned off the alarm. I looked at the clock. Midnight.

I hopped out of bed. I was already dressed, so all I had to do was grab the video camera.

I tiptoed to the window and peeked outside. There were no clouds tonight. I could see the lawn clearly. The gnomes were there — standing still as statues.

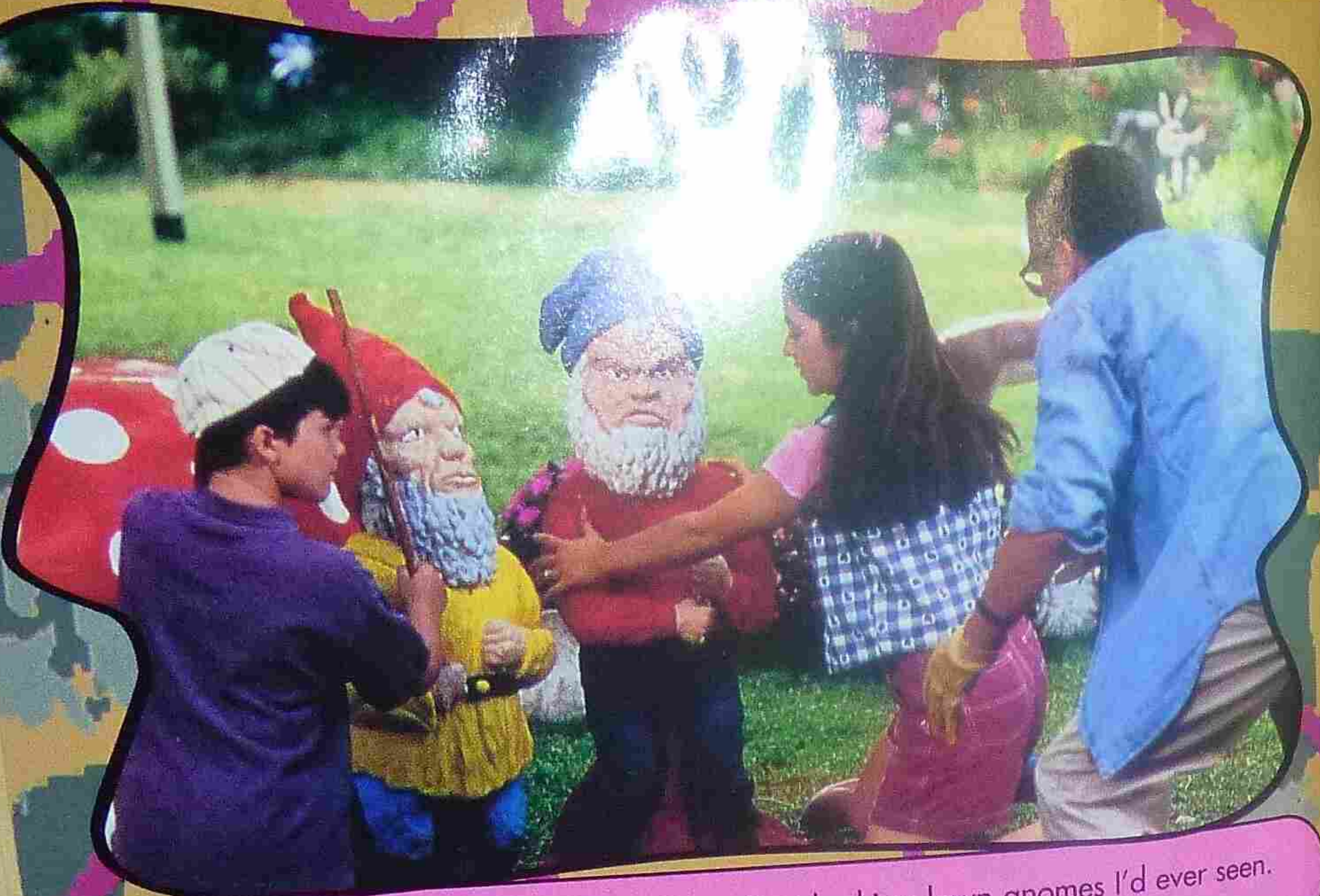
Now all I had to do was watch!

I held the viewfinder up to my eye and waited for something to happen. It didn't take long.

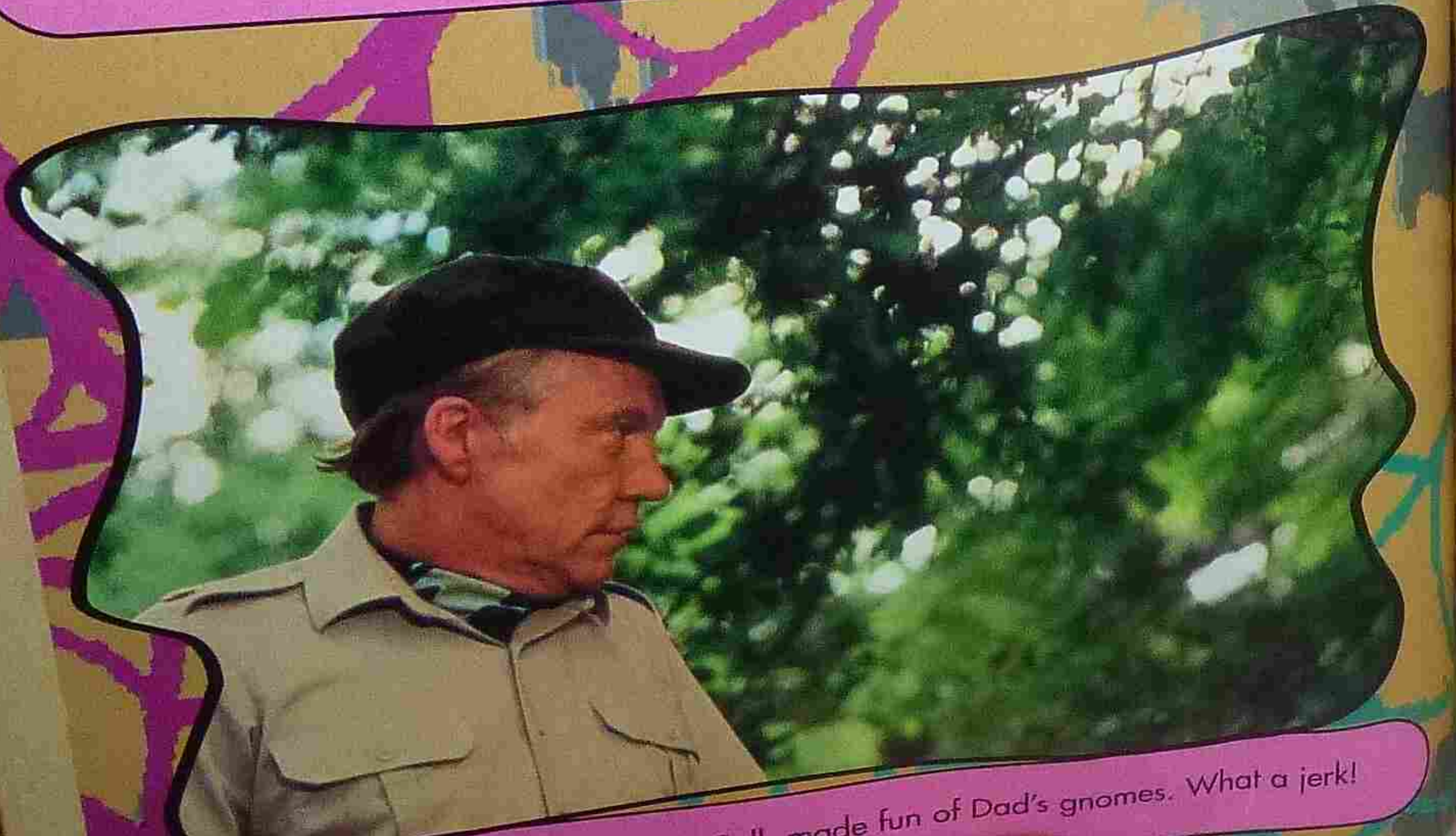
Slowly, the statues came to life. The gnome in the red cap yawned and stretched. Its right arm bonked the other gnome on its green-capped head. That gnome's eyes popped open, too.

The red gnome whispered something to the green gnome. Then they both gazed up at my window. I ducked back into the shadows

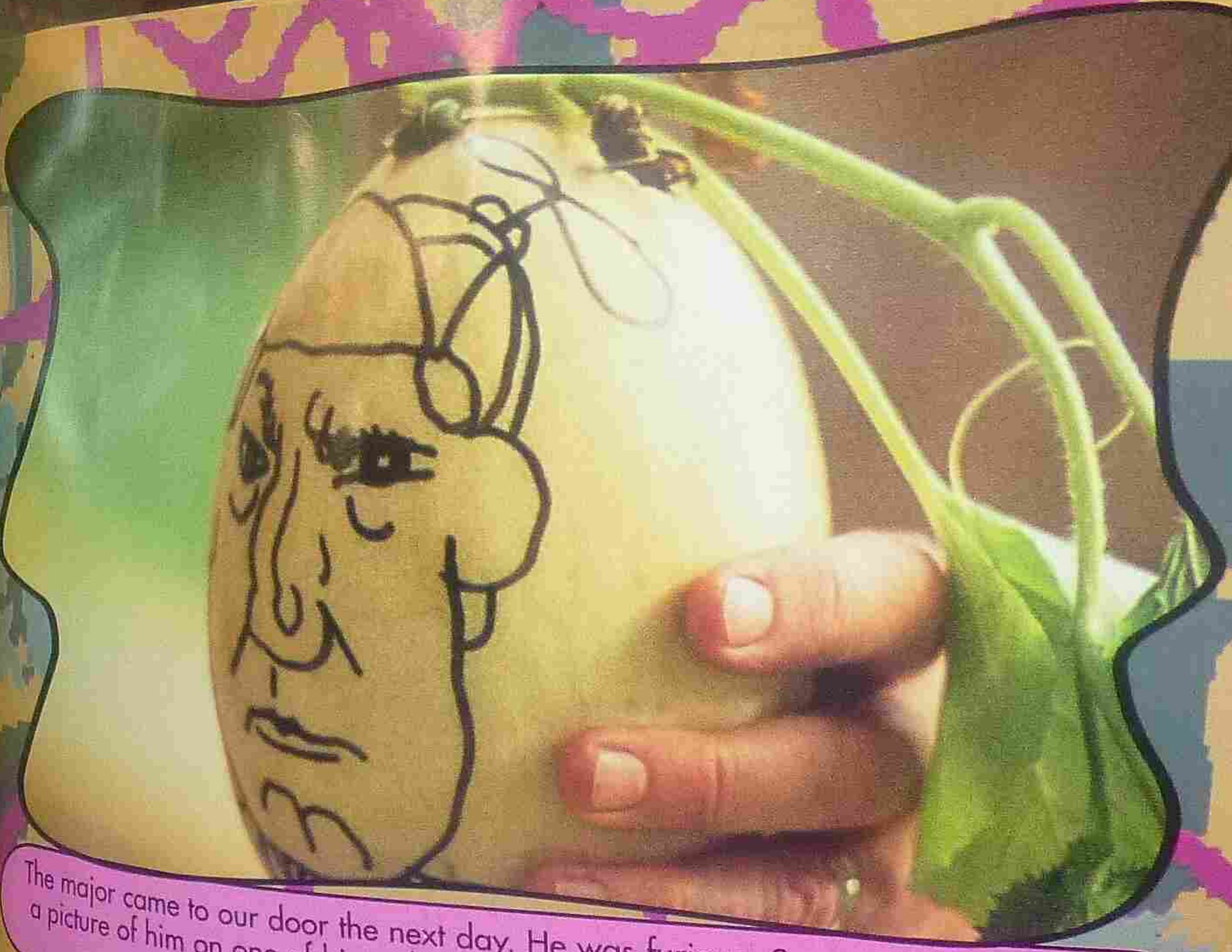
My name is Joe Burton. My sister, Mindy, and I like to hang out in our [illegible]rd. It's full of little garden statues that our dad collects.



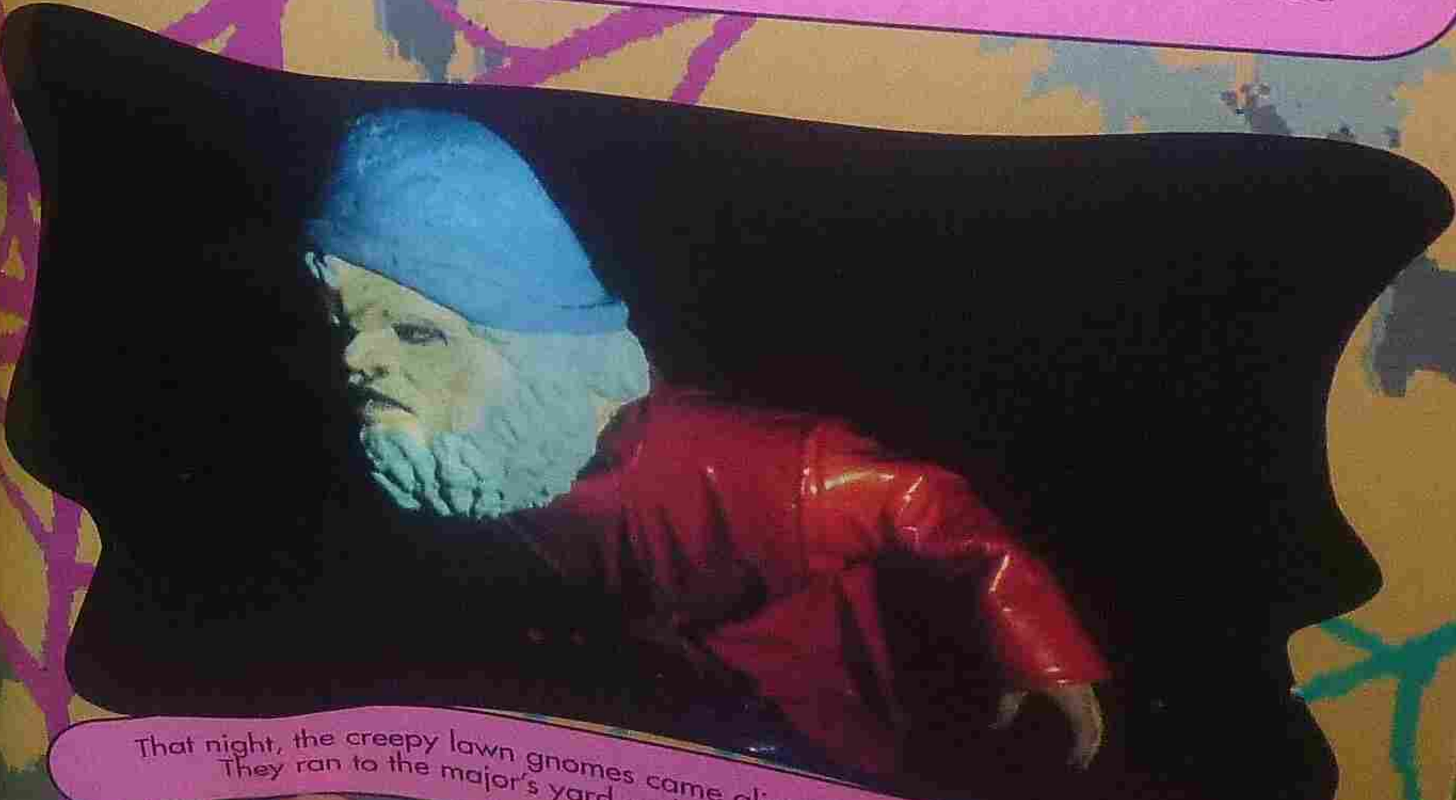
One day Dad came home with the ugliest-looking lawn gnomes I'd ever seen. They wore evil grins on their faces.



Our nosy neighbor, Major McCall, made fun of Dad's gnomes. What a jerk!

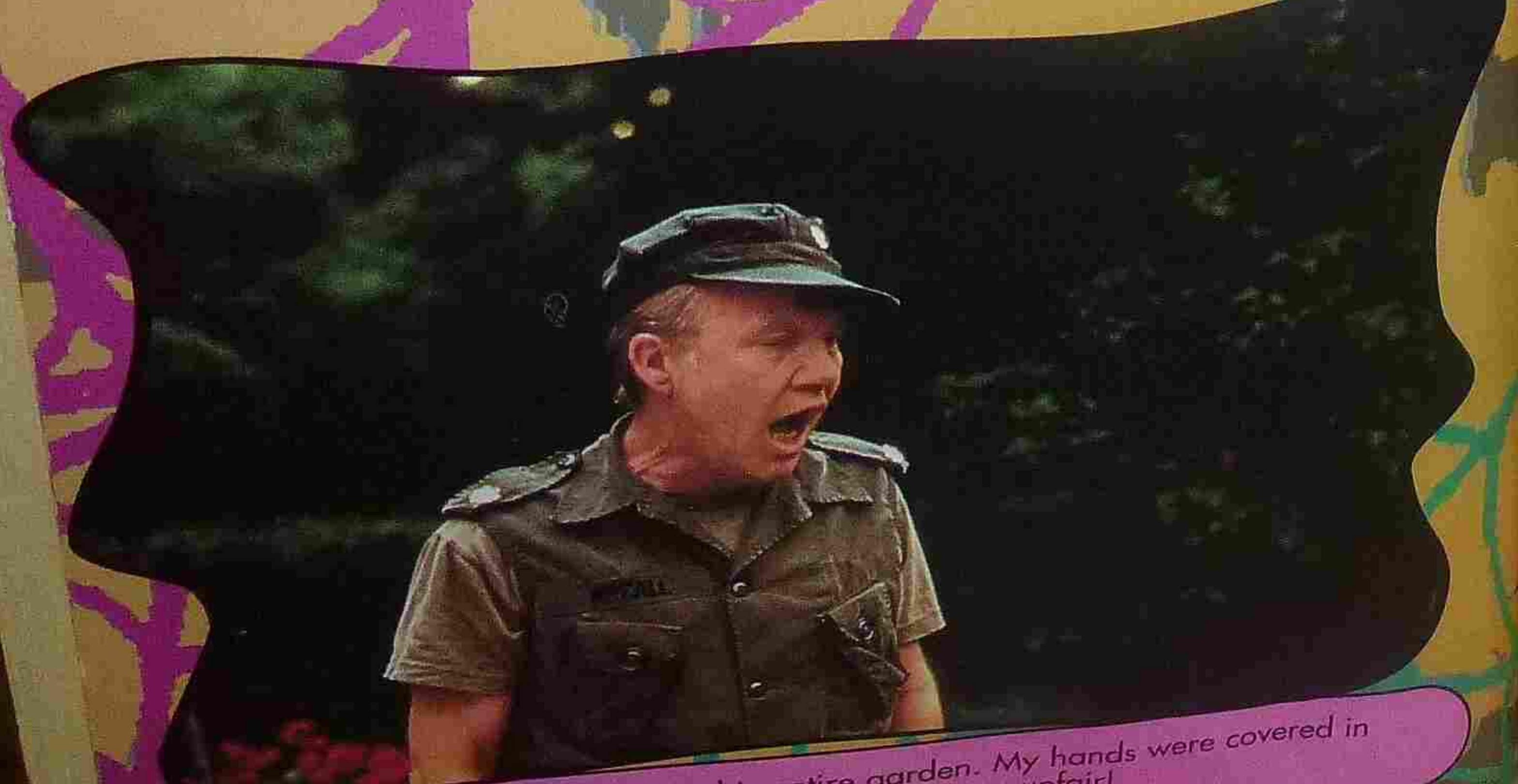


The major came to our door the next day. He was furious. Someone had drawn a picture of him on one of his melons. I thought it was funny—until he blamed me for it.



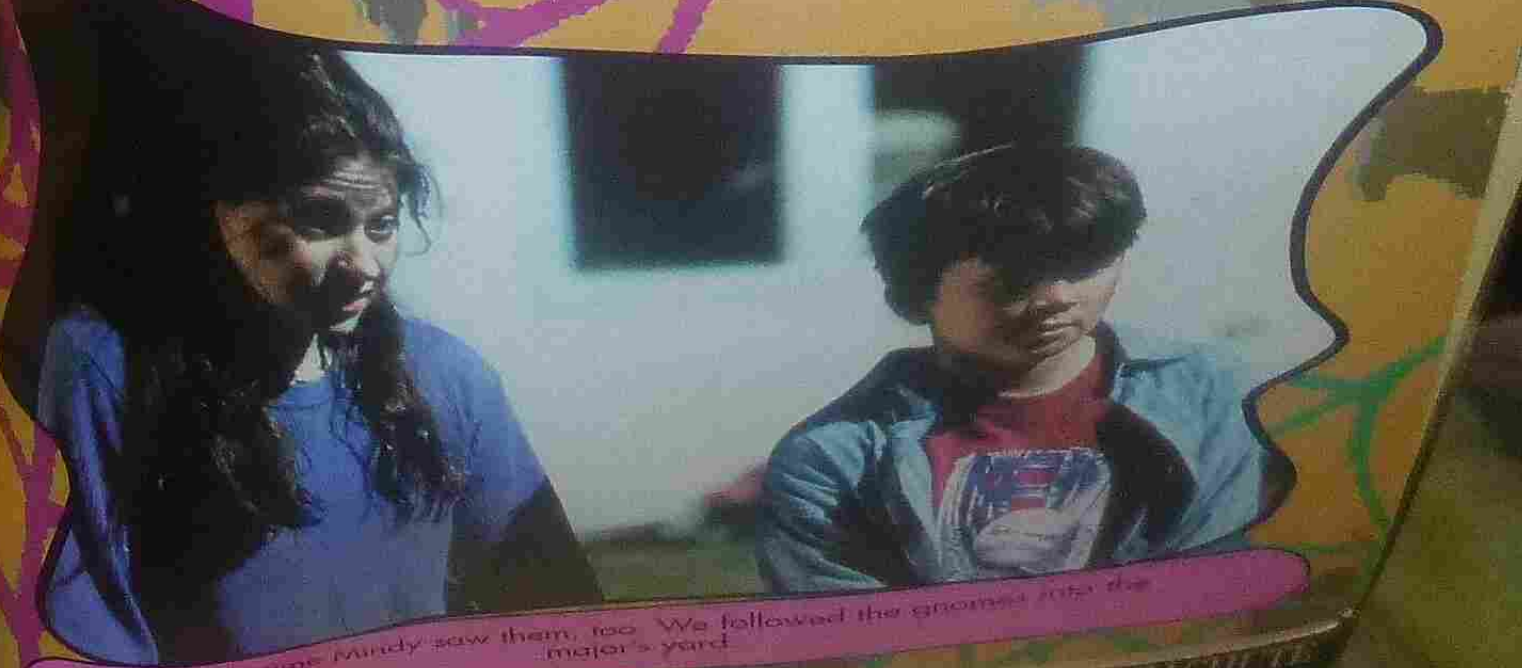
That night, the creepy lawn gnomes came alive! I saw it with my own eyes! They ran to the major's yard and started tearing up his garden.

Of course *I* got blamed again. No one would believe that it was the lawn gnomes. I was in *major* trouble!

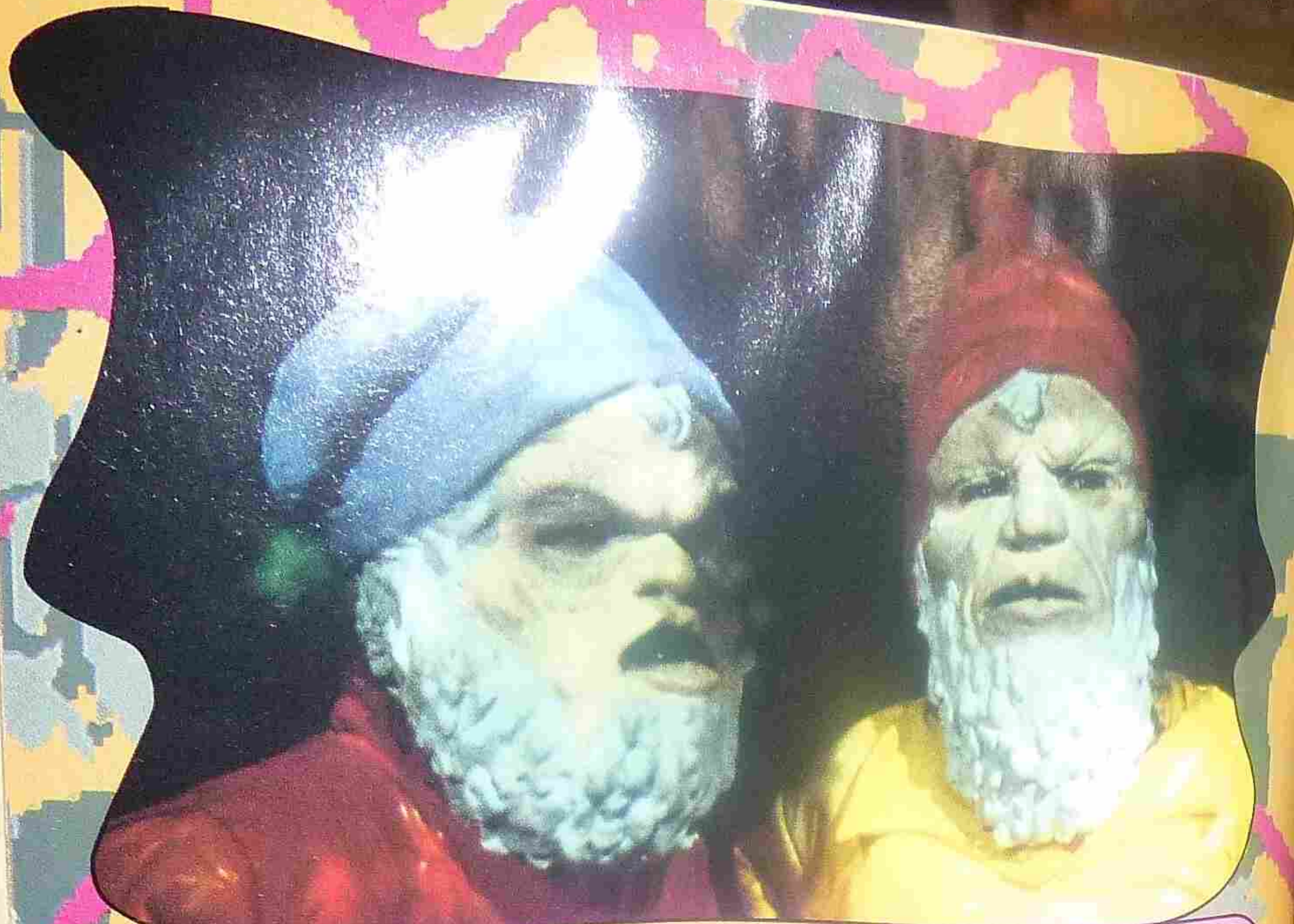


The major made me replant his entire garden. My hands were covered in stinky manure. Yuck! It was so unfair!

That night, the gnomes came to life again. And they jumped the fence into the major's garden.



But this time Mindy saw them, too. We followed the gnomes into the major's yard.



I pointed my flashlight at them. And the weirdest thing happened. The gnomes froze on the spot! They must come alive only in the dark, I realized.

After a few minutes my flashlight died—and the gnomes came back to life.

Suddenly Major McCall burst out of his house. He was furious. He's pretty scary when he's angry—nearly as scary as the gnomes!

You won't believe what happened then. Let's just say, Major McCall doesn't bother us anymore.

and frantically pushed the Record button on the camera.

Nothing happened.

Then, bright white letters flashed on and off across the viewfinder:

NO TAPE! NO TAPE! NO TAPE!

"Oh, no," I moaned. I yanked the camera away from my eye. How dumb could I be? I'd forgotten to load it!

I raced to my desk, grabbed a blank cassette, and popped it into the camera. Then I raced back to the window.

I held the camera to my eye again. But when I pointed it at the gnomes, I couldn't believe what I saw!

8

Nothing!

The gnomes were gone!

I blinked my eyes and looked again. They still weren't there.

When Dad sees that they're gone, I thought, he'll have to believe me!

I dashed to my parents' room. The door was closed. I bent down and put my ear to the keyhole. Silence. Then a soft snore.

I pushed the door open. The light from the hallway shone in. Dad's mouth was wide open. But his eyes were shut tight. So were Mom's.

I tiptoed to my father's side of the bed

and shook his shoulder. He rolled away from me.

"Dad!" I whispered urgently. "Wake up!"

"Huh?" he mumbled. "Wha — ?"

"Dad!" I said, a little louder. "The gnomes!"

"Whuzzat?" he muttered. His eyes were still shut. "The phones aren't ringing. No phones."

"Not the *phones*," I said. "The *gnomes*!"

My mother shook her head in confusion. "The gnomes are calling?" she said sleepily. "At this hour?"

"They're not *calling*," I said. "They're *missing*. I —"

Now Mom's eyes opened wide with alarm. "Missing?" she cried. "Who's missing?"

"No one is missing, dear," Dad assured her. "It's only a dream. Go back to sleep."

"It *isn't* a dream," I insisted. "This is real."

But it was no use. Mom's eyelids had already fluttered shut. And Dad was snoring again.

I dashed out of their room and down the

hall to my sister's room. As soon as I opened the door, Mindy sat up in bed.

"What are you doing in my room?" she demanded.

"Mindy," I cried. "Get dressed. You have to come with me. The gnomes are gone!"

"Someone stole the gnomes?" she asked. "You're kidding."

"I'm not kidding," I said. "But nobody *stole* them."

Mindy lay back down and pulled the covers up to her chin. "You're dreaming, Joe," she muttered. "Go back to sleep."

I whipped the covers off her. "This is serious!" I exclaimed. "If you don't believe me, come see for yourself."

"Oh, all right," Mindy said. She pulled on her robe and followed me out the door. "I might as well," she grumbled. "Thanks to you, I'm wide awake, anyway!

"I don't know why I let you talk me into these things," Mindy complained. But she followed me downstairs to the kitchen. I picked up a flashlight.

"Let's go," I whispered. I led the way out the back door.

Mindy kept complaining. She didn't shut up until I flicked the flashlight onto the empty spot where the gnomes had stood. Then her mouth dropped open.

"What did you do to them?" she asked.

"I didn't do anything," I insisted. "They came to life and left by themselves."

"Yeah, right! They come to life when no one's around." She rolled her eyes. Then she grabbed the flashlight out of my hand. "So where are they?"

Mindy waved the flashlight beam around the garden. Two red eyes glittered in the light. A second later, they vanished into the darkness.

"Did you see that?" I whispered.

But Mindy wasn't even looking. Her eyes were scrunched shut in a huge yawn.

A low growl rumbled through the bushes. Mindy's eyes popped open.

"What was *that*?" she yelped.

"Shh!" I hissed. I clapped a hand over her mouth.

We tiptoed silently across the lawn. The wind began to moan. Just the way it had last night.

"M-maybe we should go back," Mindy whispered.

"No way," I said. "Come on." I was kind of nervous myself. But those gnomes kept getting me into trouble.

I *had* to find out what was really going on.

A branch snapped behind us. Mindy and I both jumped. Now I felt really nervous. Maybe my sister was right. Maybe we *should* go back. I turned around to tell her.

But it was too late! I suddenly knew where the missing gnomes were.

Right behind us!

The yard was filled with gnomes. Living, breathing gnomes. Not just our two — but a whole army of them!

They stared at us through slitted eyes. They bared their teeth.

The gnomes came closer. Closer still.

Mindy gripped my hand and squeezed hard. I squeezed back.

The gnomes lunged at us.

"Run, Mindy!" I yelled. "Run!"

9

Mindy and I raced across the lawn. We tore through the bushes and into Major McCall's yard.

I glanced over my shoulder. The gnomes chased after us.

"Split up!" I told Mindy.

Mindy zigged right. I zigged left.

The first two gnomes stopped in their tracks. The ones behind plowed into them. They pushed and shoved each other for a moment.

Then they split up, too. Half of them ran after Mindy. The others followed me.

I faked right. Mindy faked left. We crashed into each other.

One of the gnomes grabbed my arm. Mindy pushed it away. We began to run. I could hear my sister breathing hard.

A small pointed foot darted out of the brush in front of me. I flew head over heels through the air!

And landed hard — flat on my back.

"Have a nice trip! See you next fall!" a shrill voice cackled in my ear.

I looked up and saw two gnomes bending over me.

"Joe!" Mindy gasped. She pushed the gnomes aside. "Are you okay?"

"I think so," I replied. I shook my head to clear it.

"I'm sorry I didn't believe you," she said.

One of the gnomes scooped up the camera I'd dropped on the ground. Another gnome snatched the flashlight right out of Mindy's hand.

The gnome with the flashlight tried to take a bite out of it. "Give me that thing," the one with the camera shrieked.

It grabbed the flashlight and pointed the camera at Mindy and me.

"Action! Action!" it cried. The other gnomes danced around us. Poking us in the ribs. Pushing us.

"Help!" Mindy wailed.

"Let's squish them like bugs!" the camera gnome squealed.

The one in the red cap gave its buddy a shove. "That's stupid," it screeched. "Let's twist them like pretzels instead."

"Put a magic spell on them!" another gnome offered.

"No," the camera gnome insisted. "Squish — !"

"I've got it!" the second gnome cut in. "We should squish them like bugs."

The camera gnome raised my camera and bopped the other gnome over the head with it. "That's what *I* said!"

All the gnomes started shoving each other. The harder they shoved, the louder they screamed.

I clapped my hands over my ears.

Mindy put her fingers to her lips and let out a piercing whistle. "Stop!" she hollered.

The gnomes stopped.

"Why are you doing this?" Mindy asked.

"Don't you know anything about gnomes?" one of them answered. "It's what we do!"

"It's our nature," another explained. "We make mischief. Anywhere. Anytime. To anyone!"

"Like you!" the camera gnome cried, whacking its friend in the head.

"Like you!" the friend cried, whacking it back. And they all started shoving each other around again.

"Hey! Watch it!" the camera gnome cried. Too late. It was already tumbling to the ground. The flashlight and the camera flew out of its hand.

Another gnome caught the camera in midair. But the flashlight landed beside it with a thud.

The On button hit the dirt. A bright white beam shone through the darkness.

The gnomes scurried away — all but one.

The one who got caught in the beam of bright light. It froze on the spot.

For a moment I couldn't figure it out.

And then I understood.

"Mindy!" I cried. "We're safe! I know how to stop the gnomes!"

10

Mindy stared at me in confusion. "What?" she asked.

"Don't you get it?" I whispered. "The light freezes them. They only come alive in the dark."

"What?" Mindy asked again.

"Shh!" I hissed. But it didn't matter. The other gnomes were too busy arguing with each other to listen to us.

"Now look what you did!" the red-capped gnome yelled at the camera gnome.

"Me?" the camera gnome protested. "You started it!"

A big gnome I hadn't noticed before

stepped between them. "The light!" it cried. "Get the *liiii* — !"

I dove for the flashlight. So did the camera gnome. The big gnome tried to jump out of the way. It tripped over my leg.

It crashed to the ground.

The gnome with the green cap leaped on my back. Mindy grabbed its arms and tried to pull it off. "Leave my brother alone!" she shouted.

The gnome in the red cap grabbed the green one's legs. While it and Mindy played tug-of-war, I snatched up my flashlight. I aimed it at the camera gnome.

The camera gnome gave one shrill cry. Then it threw up its arms to block its face. It froze in that position.

Two other gnomes rushed forward with angry shrieks. I raised the flashlight and pointed it at them.

"Stop!" I cried. "Come one step closer, and I'll turn you into Mount Rushmore."

The gnomes stopped where they were.

Mindy and I slowly backed away.

The big gnome darted out of the bushes behind us. I spun around and froze it with the light. The camera gnome popped up again.

I held the flashlight in front of me and waved it around. The gnomes began to mutter.

The mutters got louder and louder. But the gnomes kept their distance — just beyond the circle of light.

I grabbed Mindy's hand. "Let's go!" I told her.

The flashlight flickered. The light began to fade.

"Oh, no!" I groaned. "The batteries are dying."

"What are we going to do?" Mindy cried.

"Yeah, what are you going to do, smart guy?" the big gnome teased me. It stepped a little closer.

I aimed the flashlight right at its face. But the beam was really dim now. It kept coming at us.

I glanced over my shoulder. I could see our porch light burning brightly. Our house looked safe and warm — and far away.

I turned back to Mindy. Her eyes were wide with fear. I checked out the distance to our house again.

"You'll never make it!" a gnome at my left cried.

"Get them!" a gnome at my right cried.

"Mindy!" I shouted. "Run for it!"

We both raced for home.

I was inches from the gate when I heard Mindy cry out. I looked back — and saw her sprawled on the ground. She was holding her ankle and moaning in pain.

"Mindy!" I cried.

Before I could do anything, two pairs of gnarly gnome hands reached out for her. Mindy opened her mouth and screamed.

"HELP! HELP! HELLLLLP!"

Major McCall's security lights blazed on. The siren filled the air.

Our two gnomes froze in the glow. Their

lips were pulled back in midsnarl. Their friends dove back into the bushes.

"What's going on out there?" the major called from his back porch. He stood stiffly at attention. His eyes circled the scene.

I pulled Mindy up. "Come on!" I cried. "*Now!*" We sprinted for the gate.

"I see you Burton brats!" the major screamed after us. "Don't you run away from me!"

I could hear the major's footsteps thudding down the stairs. Mindy and I ran faster.

Suddenly there was a loud crash. I turned to see what was going on. I had a perfect view.

The major stood right in the spotlight. He was staring at our two lawn gnomes. He must have knocked one over as he ran.

Mindy and I stopped right outside the gate. We waited to see what would happen next.

The major gave the gnomes a dirty look. "I've had it with this junk! I'm going to get

rid of it once and for all," he muttered. "Starting with you!" he added, kicking the red-capped gnome with his heavy army boot.

He picked up the gnome and slung it over his shoulder. He carried it toward the front of his house.

Away from the light.

The major and the gnome disappeared into the darkness.

A moment later, Mindy and I heard strange sounds coming from the shadows. Scuffles. A gnomish cackle. A strangled cry.

And a loud crash.

I looked at Mindy.

Mindy looked at me.

"Let's get out of here!" we both cried together.

11

"Cross your fingers," Dad whispered.

Mom, Mindy, and I gathered around him on the porch and smiled nervously.

It was Sunday morning — the day of the Summer Garden Contest. The panel of judges had already checked out every inch of our garden. Now they had their heads together and were all whispering at once. I wondered what was taking so long.

Finally, the head judge made a note on his clipboard. He nodded to the others and flashed a big smile in our direction. I smiled back as they started toward us. I could tell we'd won the contest!

Halfway across the lawn, the head judge stopped. He pointed to something behind one of the lawn gnomes. All three judges huddled around, staring into the bushes behind the oak tree.

They stayed there for a long time, pointing and talking. Finally, they turned slowly back toward the house.

The head judge shuffled up to Dad and cleared his throat. "It was a most difficult choice, Mr. Burton," he began. "We love your creative decorations. . . ."

"We've never seen another garden quite like it," another judge added.

"Why, thank you very much," Dad said proudly.

Mom kissed Dad on the cheek. "I knew you could do it, dear," she whispered.

Dad blushed. "I'm deeply honored to accept the grand prize," he declared. Then he reached out to shake the judge's hand.

The judge took Dad's hand. But he didn't shake it. There was a long silence.

"We were going to give you the grand

prize," the judge said slowly. "But then we saw . . ." His voice trailed off as he wandered back to the gnomes. We all followed him.

When we were standing right in front of the gnomes, the judge cleared his throat again.

"Well," he went on. "It was so out of place, so . . . ugly!" he declared with a slight shudder.

"Ugly?" Dad echoed. He shook his head in disbelief. "You think my lawn gnomes are *ugly*?"

"Oh, no," the judge assured him. "We *love* the lawn gnomes. Charming little fellows. Quite adorable, I'd say."

Dad looked really confused. "Well?" he said. "Then what are you talking about?"

The judge pushed one gnome to the left and one to the right. "That!" he declared.

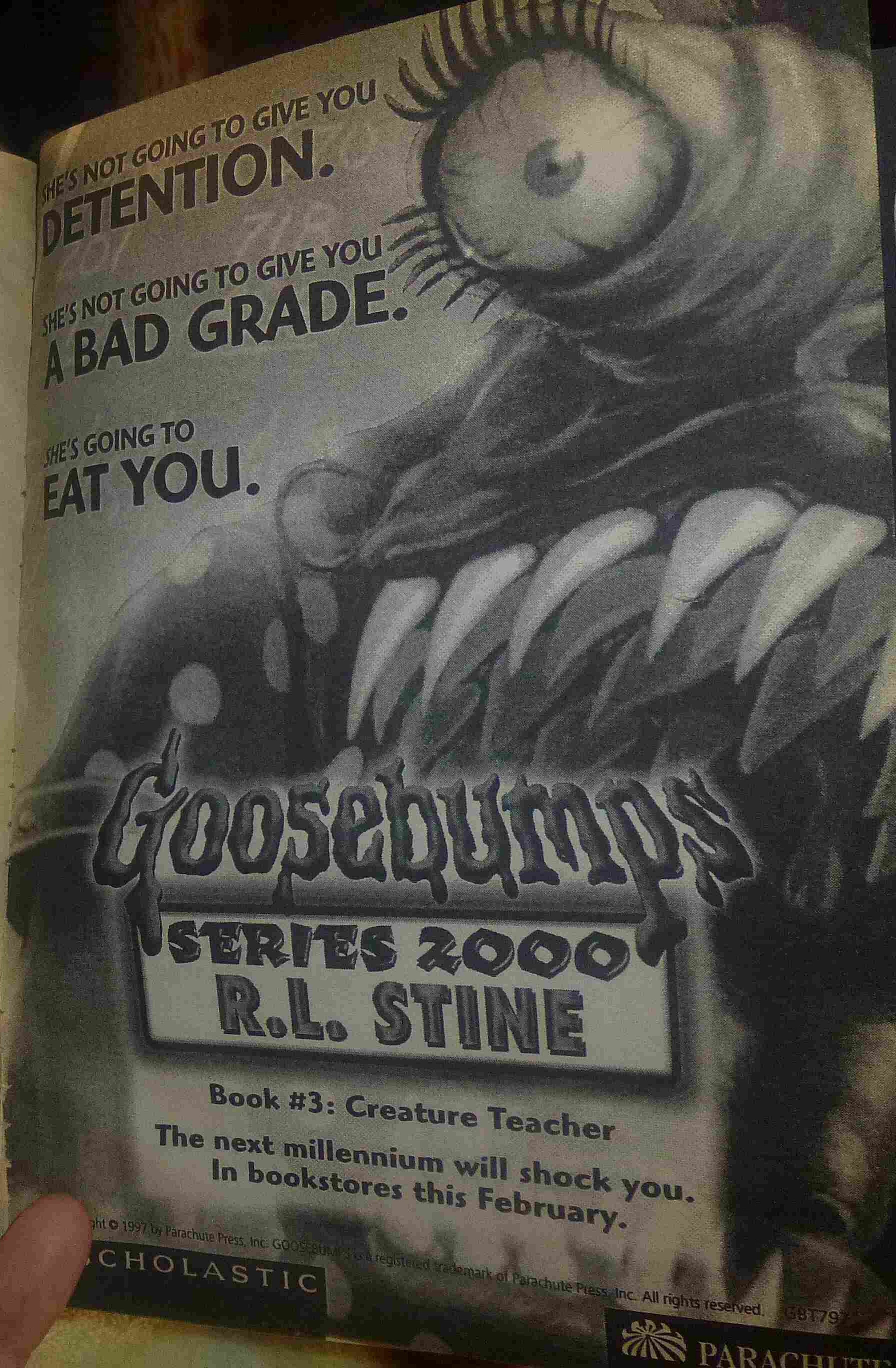
Our whole family looked where the judge was pointing.

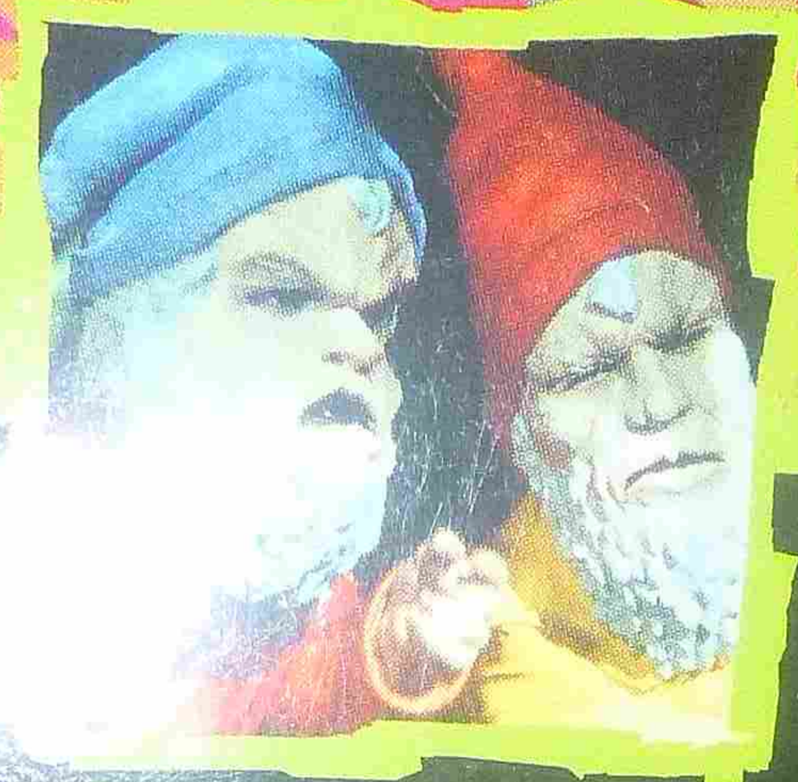
There, at full attention, right arm raised in a salute, stood Major McCall.

Except it wasn't really Major McCall. It was a life-sized metal lawn ornament that looked just like him.

I snuck a quick peek at the gnomes. For once, they didn't seem to be staring back at me. Their little red eyes were fixed on the newest addition to our garden.

And their mean little mouths were definitely smiling.





Goosebumps®

PRESENTS:

REVENGE OF THE LAWN GNOMES

"Sometimes I think my dad is totally strange. I mean, other dads collect things like power tools. My dad collects lawn ornaments. We have a turtle, a skunk, a deer—you name it!

"Then the other day my dad brought home two lawn gnomes. They have sharp teeth and beady little eyes. At first I thought they were just really ugly. But that was before one of them grabbed me. No joke! These gnomes are alive. And they're out to get me!"

—Joe Burton

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